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ABSTRACT

American River College's (ARC's) model for evaluating instructional programs using a mini-accreditation approach is presented in this report. First, a rationale for program evaluation is provided, focusing on its role in future planning, improving existing programs, accounting for expenditures, and self-validation. Next, program evaluation is defined as a process for judging the extent to which a program has succeeded in achieving intended goals; and the essential characteristics of a scientific approach to program review are outlined. After specifying limitations of existing approaches (e.g., their subjectivity, quantitative nature, and association with program cutbacks), the paper outlines the main features of ARC's self-evaluation model, including: (1) the person with primary responsibility for evaluation--normally the dean of instruction; (2) the unit to be evaluated--a department, program or academic field; (3) the frequency of evaluation--once every 3 to 4 years; (4) the departmental self-evaluation--a process which includes definition of goals, measurement of goal attainment through data collection, and development of a self-evaluation report; and (5) evaluation by an outside team--an effort which involves validation of the self-evaluation report and production of a report summarizing the department's strengths, weaknesses, and directions for the future. Finally, alternative models for evaluation team membership are presented. Optional and required criteria for program evaluation are listed in an appendix. (HB)

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**A COMMUNITY COLLEGE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM EVALUATION MODEL
USING A MINI-ACCREDITATION APPROACH**

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A Community College Instructional Program Evaluation Model
Using a Mini-Accreditation Approach¹

In an age of increasing accountability, it is imperative that any evaluation model of academic programs not only be valid but flexible enough to be used in a variety of academic contexts. Such a model must take into account the uniqueness of a unit to be evaluated, yet not be over reliant upon subjective data in that only opinions are gathered.

Why is program evaluation needed? Basically, there are four reasons:

1. To do intelligent planning for the future. The world changes so rapidly that planning is often a reactive response to an emergency situation. Ideally, adequate long range planning and decision making is based upon an ongoing system of empirical data gathering and evaluation of the facts.
2. To improve existing programs, and where there are severe fiscal restraints or other causes, identify programs which are to be dropped. Every operation in any kind of organization has both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths should be identified, openly communicated, and given continued support by all personnel. Likewise, weaknesses are also identified and given clear and practical remedy for correction. Having to eliminate a program is never popular. Yet if it must be done, it is more palatable to staff if the basis for such a decision is based upon a rational and objective manner of data gathering using "hard" evidence of acts detrimental to the continuance of the program.

¹This model has been developed with only instructional programs in mind. Elements of it may also be appropriate in evaluating support services.

3. To give continued accountability of expenditures. Every public organization is accountable to someone. In the case of the community college, the general public needs to be assured that tax dollars are being wisely spent.
4. To self validate. The process of being evaluated, while often personally threatening, is still conducive to individual growth. The spirit of program evaluation is not focused upon looking for things to punish. Rather, the thrust is upon determining how the college is meeting its stated objectives and insuring that students receive the best experience that can be offered.

A definition: program evaluation is a process of judging to what extent a program of activities has been successful in achieving the intended goals. The broad yet essential characteristics of program evaluation using the scientific approach are as follows:

- Step 1. Identify the goals of the program.
- Step 2. Translate those goals into observable and measurable variables.
- Step 3. Collect data relative to the variables identified. The best strategy is to collect as much relevant data as possible using whatever techniques are most appropriate.
- Step 4. Compare the goals to the data collected and judge the success of goal attainment.
- Step 5. Write a self-evaluation report in terms of description, appraisal, and plan of action for each data element.

However, program evaluation is more than just collecting data, tabulating some facts, and writing a final report. The emphasis is on judgment, that is, on the interpretation of data regarding successful operation and the value of program outcomes. Here is how it is most different from basic research which has as its

goal - discovery of truth. Program evaluation not only seeks truth, but passes judgment as well.

In reviewing the literature and selecting other program evaluation models used in community colleges, several limitations became apparent with many of them.

1. Evaluation was overly intuitive - often based solely upon opinions of personnel who were part of the unit being evaluated.
2. Evaluation was excessively quantitative. One program evaluated university faculty by giving numerical weights to page length of publications, ordinal position of authorship, status of the journal, etc. This and other quantitative data were then summed and transformed into a single standardized score which indicated how far above or below the mean an instructor was in terms of standard deviation units. Quantitative analysis is surely part of an evaluation process, but the total evaluative worth of people and programs cannot be adequately described by simplistic reduction to a digit.
3. Evaluation was too concerned with ease of retrieving data often at the expense of overlooking other valuable information. Collecting only data which are routinely gathered and stored in computers, e.g., WSCH, class size, drop rates, etc., leads evaluators into ignoring less retrievable but useful data, e.g., opinions of matriculated students who majored in the program and are now actively employed.
4. Evaluation was too authoritarian and unilateral. Meaningful conclusions should not be reached until all sectors of the unit being evaluated have had input. Not soliciting opinions of staff is doomed to make program evaluation a hated process. Having one management person process all the retrieved information and write the report is also not apt to enjoy wide appeal.

5. Evaluation has often been done on an urgent basis, e.g., at budget time or when there is a decision crisis. The evaluative process needs to be ongoing and become a routine part of academic life.
6. Evaluation has lacked commitment. Too often it has been used as an "add on" reserved for a few programs. Likewise, staff are not apt to take evaluation very seriously if there are no consequences.
7. Evaluation has been overly identified with "cutback" in many schools. Any evaluative process should be started as a means of improving programs. It is not likely that members of a unit being evaluated will cooperatively provide valid data used in a manner which suggests elimination or cut back of their own program.

The Self-Evaluation model - Using a Mini-Accreditation Process

The primary responsibility for instructional program evaluation would logically be the dean of instruction. From that office would be designated the progression of academic programs to be evaluated, the frequency of evaluation, the general approach including minimal criteria, and the assignment of members to the evaluating team.

The unit to be evaluated

The unit would logically be a department, program, or specific academic field, e.g., history, art, music or welding. Any larger organizational units may have too diverse subject matter for specific program evaluation. Both day and evening activities within the department are evaluated.

Frequency of evaluation

A reasonable time line for evaluation would be every three or four years. During the interim period, data would be routinely collected in preparation for the evaluation period. The logistics would be as follows: If there were 30 departments, a three-year plan would call for 10 departments to be evaluated each academic year, one-third of the faculty would be involved. If a four-year schedule

were adopted, some 7-8 departments and 25% of the faculty would be concerned with evaluation. Under the three-year plan with the school on a semester system, the following progression could be followed (with adjustable years):

Spring 1983: One-third of all departments prepare for evaluation to be completed by end of Fall Semester, 1983. (More advance notice may be given.) Another one-third of the departments are put on one year's notice, and the remaining one-third given two years' notice. Also, the one-third proportion applies to both transfer and occupational oriented programs.

The general method

All members of a department are collectively charged with the responsibility of defining the department's goals/objectives, measuring the attainment of such goals, and writing a self-evaluation report. Any definitions are subject to review by the appropriate dean to determine the compatibility with the overall mission of the college. In addition, there would be certain minimally required data elements (e.g., retention statistics) which may or may not be a part of the department's stated goals. The department will collect data to support the conclusions and recommendations presented in its self-evaluation report which will be presented to an evaluating team during the actual week of the evaluation visit. The department spokesperson (or designated faculty member) assumes primary responsibility for preparing the department's self-evaluation report. All data must be in tabulated summary form. It is not the evaluating team's responsibility to pull together bits and pieces of raw data. The department spokesperson and the area dean to which the department belongs oversee this operation. Much information is collected which will reflect upon goal attainment. Some data may be "soft," e.g., opinions, attitudes, beliefs, while other data must be "hard," e.g., completion rate, employment rate, costs. In any event, the bulk of data collected should be substantially more than opinions or beliefs expressed by members of the department being evaluated. Evidence of goal attainment must be external and transcend

natural bias among personnel being evaluated. Listed in Table 1 are some of the many possible required and optional criterion variables upon which data could be collected and presented in the department's self-evaluation report. Those variables marked with a (1) are offered as minimally required data for occupational programs while those with a (2) may be required of both occupational and transfer-oriented programs. The usual methods of collecting such information are listed in Table 2.

At the department's discretion, any additional data beyond what are minimally required may be included in the report to the evaluation team. Each department is free to choose or develop its own particular methods and written forms used in data gathering. However, to assure some commonality within the department, its members should agree upon general methodology. Every faculty member cannot go in different directions with different written forms when a consensus report is to be written. This does not preclude additional questions or forms addressed to unique aspects (sub-programs) within the department.

Evaluation team

This team is charged with validating the self-evaluation report and writing a brief summary report with observations and recommendations. The team may call for additional information, interview personnel, and have access to all course-related records. Neither the self-evaluation report nor the team's final report shall use names of personnel nor divulge what would normally be confidential information. Nevertheless, the team is responsible for writing a candid report summarizing the department's strengths, weaknesses, and directions for the future. If their report is highly critical, the team may recommend another evaluation be done before the customary three or four years. The team shall also provide an opportunity for rebuttal to its final report by members of the evaluated department. Such rebuttal

responses are to be included in the final report as well. Copies of the reports are given to the members of the department, the appropriate area dean, the president, and the dean of instruction.

Membership of the evaluating team is determined by the dean of instruction after having considered any recommendations for personnel not employed by the school. The team must be adequately independent of and external to the department being evaluated. One approach to evaluation team membership is to bring in more personnel who are not employed by the school in question. Several options, combinations and number of personnel are possible beyond the four listed below:

Option 1. Most External - Transfer Program

One faculty member from an allied department within the same school.

(This individual would know the local idiosyncracies and could function as chairperson).

One member with the same department identity (or subject matter) from a four-year college.

One faculty member with the same department identity (or subject matter) from another community college.

One private citizen.

One member of management from another school.

One high school teacher with same or similar subject matter identity.

Option 2. Least External - Transfer Program

One faculty member from an allied department within the same school. (This individual would function as chairperson.)

One member of management, same school.

Four faculty members, same school.

Option 3. Most External - Occupation Program

One faculty member from an allied department within the same school.

(This individual would know the local idiosyncrasies and would function as chairperson.)

One faculty member with the same department identity (or subject matter) from another community college.

One member of management from another school.

One high school teacher with same or similar subject matter identity.

Two private citizens representing consumers of occupational students.

Option 4. Least External - Occupational Program

One faculty member from an allied department within the same school. (This individual would function as chairperson.)

One member of management, same school.

Three faculty members, same school.

One private citizen representing consumer of occupational students.

Summary

The prospect of global departmental evaluation is intriguing for it suggests a time of intense self-study and growth on a more specific level than heretofore done. Such frequent assessment is a big undertaking involving many people. Outsiders on the evaluation team will have to be compensated for their costs. Likewise, "locals" on the team may be given some form of preferred assignment or relief from other obligations when they are involved. The department spokesperson of the unit being evaluated has the task of organizing and preparing the department's self-evaluation report. That person should be give some compensation-- be it stipend, release time, preferred assignment, or relief from other academic obligations. Such comprehensive program evaluation if done throughout the entire campus then becomes a foundation for campuswide accreditation.

Table 1
Possible Optional and Required Criterion Information
For Departmental Program Evaluation

	1 = Possible required, occupational programs
	2 = Possible required, transfer and occupational programs
2	Enrollment trends per class - current versus past three years Class size trend, current versus past three years
2	Program cost
2	Successful class completion rate, percent of students earning units to beginning enrollment - past three years
2	Class drop rate - past three years
1	Job placement rate, completers with positive placement past three years Space utilization, percents of beginning and ending enrollment to space available
1	Opinion of employers
2	Opinion of program's reputation at other advanced institutions (transfer only)
2	Opinion of current enrolled students in program
2	Opinion of program graduates or graduated majors Opinion of personnel who affect student's entry decision into the program, e.g., counselors
1	Effect of occupational training upon improving employability over those without training
1	Duplication of training by employers or other programs
1	Employment rate by sex, by ethnicity
1	Enrollment rate by sex, by ethnicity
2	Program completion rate by sex, by ethnicity
1	Rate of upward mobility - wages

Table 1 (Continued)

	Datedness of program or equipment
2	Adequacy of staff number, support staff, budget, equipment
	Clarity of instructor's course objectives
2	Appropriateness of educational objectives of program
	Quality of curriculum and adequacy of methods used to evaluate it and revise it.
2	Grading practices and standards
2	Student evaluation of courses
	Adequacy of procedures used to assess instruction
2	Basic skill levels of students in program compared to general student body
2	Professional growth activities utilized by staff
	Balance in faculty workload; extent of faculty contribution to program planning and review procedures
2	Academic or professional performance of students after completing program
2	Professional contributions by faculty, e.g., books, articles
	Student - faculty ratio per course, beginning enrollment
	Recognition or awards given faculty or staff for professional achievement
2	Course outlines and recency of revision
2	Student achievement rates in course
	Student alumni awards
2	Current faculty vita or resume
2	History of program, origin, evolution, forecast for subject matter
	Value of program to society
1	Any additional data not listed above but required by law

Table 2

Methods Used to Collect Data

Questionnaires	Follow-up studies
Locally designed inventories	Experimental studies
Proficiency tests	Correlational studies
Standardized tests or instruments	Archival records
Interviews	Rating scales
Observations	Expert Opinion

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